

ADOLPH HENRY AHRENS

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Adolph Henry Ahrens

(1878 - 1973)

At the age of fourteen, Mr. Ahrens left his birthplace in West Germany to become a seaman, working first on fishing boats in the North Sea, then as a cabin boy on a steamer bound for major European seaports. After traveling extensively, he finally arrived at Honolulu where he joined the crew on the Lewers & Cooke lumber schooner Alice Cooke and made his last seaman's voyage as a Second Mate with Captain Penhallow.

It was because he had met his future wife, Martha Block, in 1902 that he decided to give up sea life and settle down in Honolulu. He landed a job with the construction company that was building the Young Hotel at the time. He later worked in the machine shop at Honolulu Rapid Transit Company for nearly twenty-four years; at Hawaiian Pineapple Company for two years; and at Pearl Harbor for eighteen years as an electrician until 1947.

Affectionately known as "Pop," Mr. Ahrens was president of the German Benevolent Society for forty years and a longtime member of several other organizations.

Reminiscing at the age of ninety-three, Mr. Ahrens relates his personal and employment history from 1892 to 1971.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

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INTERVIEW WITH ADOLPH HENRY AHRENS

In his home at 1082 Kinau Street, Honolulu, 96814

November 16, 1971

A: Adolph H. Ahrens

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

A: I'm supposed to be born on 1878, eighteenth of June.

M: Okay. Let me see if I've got your name right now. It's Adolph?

A: Adolph.

M: Your name.

A: Adolph H.

A: Is that A-D-O-L-P-H?

A: Adolph H. the second, this because they always want two names nowadays.

M: Is that correct spelling? (she shows him her spelling of it)

A: Adolph H. Ahrens, that's right.

M: Where were you born?

A: Hmm?

M: Where were you born?

A: In Germany. The place, you mean? A little town called Kreul.

M: Could you spell that?

A: K-R-E-U-L.

M: What part of Germany is that?

A: West Germany. It's in Hanover district.

M: Oh, okay.

A: Well I left--I left school at--in 1892.

M: What was that? You finished high school.

A: No. No. No. You see, I was born in '78. '88 would be ten. Wait a minute.

M: So you'd be fourteen.

A: Ninety-nine. '92. Yeah, I was fourteen. Yeh.

M: Okay. Before you go on, what did your father do for a living?

A: Oh, he--they had a little store. Storekeeper.

M: Oh. What kind of store?

A: Fruit and everything. Everything! Yeh.

M: Oh.

A: General store.

M: Uh huh.

A: For the little town, you know. All kinds of, well, mostly eatable stuff, you know. Then he had a wagon that he'd go out with in small places in the country, you know, and sell.

M: Did you help him? Did you work in the store?

A: No. No. I had a brother that was older than me. He was hit in the head with a box. He was working on the ships in the harbor in Hamburg and it hit him and paralyzed him and they operated on his legs and everything and he's been paralyzed since he was twenty years old.

So in 1921, my wife's parents went over there and they told me they were pulling him around--you know they have those four-wheel carts, you know--and the kids were pulling him around. So they told me about it, so I wrote them. I says to them and told them to buy a [wheel chair] so he got a [wheel chair] that he could push, you know, with two big wheels and the small ones in the back. So he had a little pleasure out of life, anyway. He died. Well, my parents all died, except my mother. My mother died in her

seventies. But all the rest of them died in the eighties.

M: Hmmm.

A: So . . .

M: And you're . . . let's see, you're ninety-four?

A: I will be. Yeh. Ninety-four. This year. On the eighteenth of June, I'll be ninety-four years old. And well then, I left school and then I worked at different places around there--no use you mention it more--at different jobs for about six months at home. Then I went to Hamburg.

M: Let me get your parents' names.

A: Hmm?

M: Before we go on, can I get your parents' names?

A: Peter.

M: Your parents' names.

A: My parents' names were--my father's name was Peter and my mother's name was Katrina.

M: Okay. Can you spell Pater for me?

A: Peter.

M: P-A . . . ?

A: P-E

M: PE . . . T-E-R . . .

A: Yeh.

M: Oh, you pronounce it Pater.

A: Pater, yeh.

M: Oh, I see. How many brothers and sisters did you have altogether?

A: Well, the close I can figure out, ten of 'em.

M: Ten children?

A: Yeh, ten children.

M: Wow!

A: Yes. And there's three of us left yet. I got two brothers and a sister. I just had a letter from my sister. She's eighty-two and she says she's still keeping house. She says, "I don't know what I'm going to do when I can't do it any-more." She says, "I can't afford to go to the old people's home." She says, "The old people's home here are for the rich people, not the poor." Well, it's the same thing here.

M: This is in Germany.

A: I stayed at that home out Waikiki there, the Lutheran home [Laniolu]. Twenty-five dollars a day; \$750 a month for there. You know, they tell me--this fellow was here just now, he belongs to Masonic Lodge--the Masonic Lodge got a place in California, Dakota. But, you know, there is so damn much rigamarole. There, you've got to give them all you've got and then . . . so, I was out there for a month and then they coaxed me back again.

Now, this nurse I have, they sent to Canada for her. She was a little German woman. She come over to Canada, in Vancouver, and she was down here before, taking care of some people's home. So my daughter and my daughter-in-law, they sent for her. I'm paying her \$300 a month, free board and lodging, and tax and Social Security. Not so bad. 'Course today, you can't open your mouth for ten dollars. (Lynda chuckles) (siren in background, very loud) Here again. Well then, she got that . . .

M: Yeh. You were saying that you worked at a number of different jobs after you got out of school.

A: I worked at several jobs at home and then I went to Hamburg and I sailed in fishing boats in the Elbe [River] and out in the North Sea. And then I made a trip in one of them steamers, as cabin boy. We went to Marseilles and Antwerp and Holland and England; all around the Atlantic, you know. So when I got back there, well then, I hung around and went in a fishing boat. I went to Bremerhaven and when I got to Bremerhaven, I quit that. And then I signed on a four-masted bark, like the Falls of Clyde, to Liverpool. See, these were sent from there and from there the crew was picked up in Germany. It was a German boat. Then we went to Leith in Scotland to pick up the boat and then went to Liverpool to load, and then from Liverpool, we sailed around and on to San Francisco--172 days.

M: Wow!

A: And when I left there, why, I jumped ship, they call it, you know.

- M: Were you a cabin boy on that boat too?
- A: No, I was ordinary seaman. Seaman. But then I signed on on a navy ship. I couldn't talk English, but I knowed the ropes and so. So we made that trip from there to--we stopped at--in Ireland, anyway, for orders. Somewhere in Ireland. And then from Ireland, we went to Antwerp. And from Antwerp, I got paid off. Let's see, I got some of this . . . see, here it shows. (in seaman's papers he has)
- M: What year was this? Does it say what year? Is this the year?
- A: No, that's the name of the ship and when she was built; the tonnage. Twenty-two years. I was twenty-two years old then.
- M: So that would have been . . . that would have been 1900.
- A: Yeah. And got paid off in Antwerp. This is . . .
- M: Oh, here's the date. Huh? May 7, 1899.
- A: Yeah. Uh huh. And from then on, I traveled. Traveled all around.
- M: On ships?
- A: I don't know what these does . . . (still looking at papers)
- M: 1898.
- A: '98? That's--that's one of them too I traveled on but that thing is all worn out, so I haven't . . . But I went to sea from that time on, on sailing ships. We stopped at Capetown and Shanghai, Yokohama, Kobe, and from Kobe we went to Portland. Portland, Oregon.
- M: That's where I'm from.
- A: Yeh. At the time, they didn't have no bridge across there. And old Front Street. Is Front Street still there?
- M: Yeah, uh huh.
- A: That used to be the life--life place, for sailors anyway.
- M: Yeh.
- A: Yeh. I remember, they had our little cups in the front there with a woman and, in the back, they had saloons and vodka.

M: Yeh.

A: Old Erickson. So I left then I--I--from there--from there I went. . . uhh-uhh. . . . (deep and heavy output of breath) (At this point, a woman enters who says she is Wilhelmina--and it sounds as if she is putting bags of groceries down with expressions of relief. The recorder is turned off, then.)

M: Okay.

A: We were, when I left . . . I told you that, Capetown and around there to Portland. From Portland, we went back to I think it was Leith in Scotland. From there on, we went to Australia. Newcastle, Australia. And I jumped ship there. And jump ship--you know, you leave everything. And then I sailed on the (in the background, the sound of a door being locked) Gotta lock the door so we don't run out. (Lynda laughs) (evidently Wilhelmina is leaving now)

So from there, I went to Australia and there I left the ship and sailed on the Kailua (there is a lot of microphone noise and Lynda is laughing about something) to Honolulu.

M: That was the name of the ship, the Kailua?

A: Kailua, yes. Highland Ross, American schooner. Highland Ross. It's called--hailed from Newcastle, England to Honolulu.

M: Newcastle, England or Australia?

A: Australia.

M: Yeh.

A: Then from there I got paid off and I met some German boys, you know, and I hung around, done a job here and there. And then in--what year was it?--I made a . . .

M: Here it says Honolulu.

A: 1903. I made a trip in a . . . oh, whatthehell--it was a Lewers & Cooke's lumber schooner. Now whatinthehell--I know the other one was Robert Louis--was one of them. And anyway, I made a trip on the--what the devil--Penhallow was the captain and I made this trip to Portland and Port Ludlow and Astoria and then back to Honolulu again. I think of the name. It should be on the--funny that I can't remember that. (loud traffic noise) Can't you see? Look up there.

- M: (reading something) Master seaman. I don't see any ship name, though.
- A: Matesman. Matesman Two. (Second Mate, perhaps)
- M: That's the Kailua.
- A: The Kailua. Then this ship's in . . .
- M: That's the Master.
- A: Master Penhallow. What was his ship's name?
- M: Well, I don't know where it says, I don't see it.
- A: Alice Cooke.
- M: Alice Cooke? That was it.
- A: Yeh.
- M: Oh yeah, here it is! Schooner Alice Cooke.
- A: From then on, when I came back, I made a trip on that sailing ship and Old Penhallow, he wanted me to stay on board and he made me a Second Mate. But I had met a young girl. She was fifteen at that time. But I don't know, we kind of--so I worked here, I worked on everything, you know. Concrete work, carpenter work. I worked eleven months in the Young Hotel. [Between October 1900 and July 1903] Everything. Concrete work and steel work and carpenter work and electrician. Ended up as an electrician. And then I worked for a little while, I worked as carpenter for --but you know, just a carpenter-helper. All you have to have--it's not like now--all you had to have was a saw and a hammer and a hatchet.
- M: Yeh. Did you ever work for John Walker? John Walker.
- A: Crocker?
- M: Walker.
- A: Sure! Sure I did. John Walker. My name is right on Piikoi and King Street yet. His house was right across there. And then the other corner, we built that sidewalk.
- M: Oh.
- A: Old John Wa. . . . Yeh. He used to graft hibiscus and make beer, too. Yes, I worked for him quite awhile. Old

John Walker, yeh. He was doing small contracting work. Then afterwards, when he died, his son took over and they went too fast, so Oh yes, we know a family--Sophie Walker. She came from Kauai and she used to live out Kahala there.

M: Yeh, she was a Klewsman.

A: Huh?

M: She was a Klewsman. German family.

A: Yeh, she had that big place out Kahala. We used to go and visit her all the time. And then they had--she had a daughter Sophie, that never got married; and the oldest one--what was it, Katherine?

M: Yeh, Katherine.

A: She married some army officer.

M: Yeh, Maloney.

A: Yeh. So we know their history pretty well. Then I worked for a--for a--oh whatthehell--a contractor--which was that now? Anyway, it was the first contractor that worked "plus." You know, so-much-plus. He gets a job, you know, and if it costs \$1,200, so much was plus that he gets. You gotta pay him. I forgot You know, the old brain box is not as good as it used to be. I can't just think of--I'll remember him after awhile. And well, then I worked around and then I went to Rapid Transit and Oral Pratt was superintendent there. Everytime I come there, "No, no job." Wouldn't give me a job.

M: Who was this?

A: Pratt. He was the superintendent for Rapid Transit. Scotchman they brought down from San Francisco. And so then I got acquainted with Professor Amay (phonetic) and Tenney Peck. Tenney Peck was the president of First National Bank [Now First Hawaiian Bank in 1979]. So they came there and they went with me to Rapid Transit to see Ballentyne. He was the manager then. He came from Canada. So when they told him . . . so he called in Mr. Pratt. "You give that man a job!" He says, "He's been coming around here. He's an able-bodied man and he wants to work. Give him a job!" That was it. "Well," he says, "the only thing I can give him is a job in the shop." That's just what I wanted. So I worked there for twenty-three years and a half. I was soon lieutenant of the shop and then . . .

M: Repairing buses?

A: Huh?

M: Repairing the buses?

A: No, repairing streetcars.

M: Streetcars?

A: Yeh, we had streetcars. We didn't have buses then. So then, during that time, I made in 1914, I made a trip to San Francisco with my wife. And then in '21 I made a trip to San Francisco. And then in '23 I made a trip to Germany with my wife and two children to celebrate my father and mother's fiftieth anniversary. And then in '56 I went--my wife and me went in '58. My daughter went along and my grandson. We celebrated my eightieth birthday over there. And then in '60 we went again, my wife and me, and then she took sick there. She had cancer of the spine. So I had to bring her back in a wheel chair and she laid in the hospital there for seven months. That took some . . . but [Will J.] Henderson, he was--I don't know whether he's still the head over there in the Queen's [Medical Center]. Administrator.

M: Yeh.

A: Well, he was very good. He took a thousand dollars off of my bill, because they burned my wife's back with the violet ray or what. They put her neck in iron, you know. Her whole back was burned. So when I told him about it, I says, "At least the hospital should do something about it." "Well," he says, "I'll see what--I don't know anything about the case, but I'll find out." You see, there was a Chinese fellow that sat there telephoning and he didn't watch it. I could look through--I couldn't get into the room, but I could look through the glass. So, he says, "I'll tend to it." So when it came through, he rolled off a thousand dollars, so that--that. . .

M: How did you meet your wife?

A: Her mother had a boarding house and I lived there. She was only fifteen then. And then after awhile, we ran around, you know, together. And so--but I remember yet, when I went on that trip, I growed a beard and a mustache and she was working for a doctor on Kinau Street, just past Piikoi, and I used to work with her there and everything. But then in 19 . . . was it 1905, wasn't it? We got married.

M: What was her name? Maiden name?

A: Martha. Martha Block.

M: How do you spell it, the last name?

A: B-L-O-C-K.

M: Martha?

M: Yeah, and she was beautiful. She was a good helpmate. We put in fifty-six years together.

M: Was she German?

A: Yeh. Yeh, she came over here in the 1880's with her parents on contract labor--you know, they had contract labor--on the sailing ship. She was only one year old. And then from there they went to Lihue, [Kauai] and the Germans who run that. And they had a pastor there, Isenberg, you know. [About that time, Paul Isenberg, a German immigrant, joined the firm of H. Hackfeld and Company, which later became American Factors, Limited, as a partner and was made president of the firm. With his brothers, Otto and Carl, he also erected the Kekaha Sugar Mill on Kauai in 1881.] And they were getting fifteen dollars a month, you know, and they were supposed to get a house and a cow and a piece of land. And they had a little piece of land. Well, you'd think they could grow without it. And the floors were still dirt wide open. So my mother-in-law, she left.

My father-in-law was only a small fellow. He was a baker. But my mother-in-law, she had hair on her teeth, I tell you. (Lynda laughs) She stayed there and worked for a doctor, you know, so she got her license as a mid-wife. And so she quit. And they piled what they had and finally their house caught fire and then they wanted them to pay for the house. So she tied up her stuff--they had two horses--and they pile everything on there they had and then they stopped at Koloa. And when they got to Koloa to stay, from Lihue, they had already telephoned there that they were on their way, so they wouldn't give them a job.

M: Oh no! Wait! I want to see if I . . . (the recorder goes off with Counter at 443)

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

M: Yeh. Okay.

A: So then she went to Waimea. A Scotchman would run the thing, McGill. I forgot now what it was. Anyway, he got

a job there as watchman. (the recorder is turned off and when it comes back on again, Mr. Ahrens' voice is several pitches higher, as is Lynda's.)

M: Okay.

A: And then, the first thing, she came over to Honolulu and he worked around, you know, helping around the buildings and stuff. And then I moved up there with them, had a room there. And so, I would say I looked after my wife and when she was eighteen, I married her.

Yeh, but, there's one thing. You know, my mother-in-law, she went to Kauai and she left us there. I never forgot. She says to me, "Adolph," she says, "I think you best move downtown." She says, "You know Martha is a young girl. She doesn't know what it's all about. And you're a grown man," she said, "and you're liable to do things."

"Well," I says, "Look, Mama," I says, "If my word's any good, I give you my word." I says, "I think too much. I wouldn't touch a hair of Martha's head." I says, "I wouldn't do anything if she asked me to." So--and I never did. I kept my word. So she says, "All right. I take your word."

She went to Kauai on a mid-wife trip and then when they come back, why, after awhile, well, it was getting--she couldn't get a job, you know, and everything. At last we talked it over and I was getting \$88 a month to get married on. But, well, we got married and we lived in Nonpareil (phonetic). At that time, you know, that time was very--oh, it's built up now, you know, but Schnack had a lot of cottages in there, opposite the water works.

M: Oh, where the water works is now?

A: Yeh, oh yeh, water works still there. So then, well, so we decided to get married and we kept house. We stayed with the old folks--then Mama couldn't boss her about, then she was my wife--for two years. Then we got this house and--by the old--you remember the old Lutheran church on Bere-tania Street?

M: No.

A: You know, that's between Miller and Punchbowl.

M: Yeh, I know that area.

A: And they had some small cottages there and so they went down and rented that cottage, my wife and her bridesmaid, Minnie Johnson. And they went and cleaned the house and everything and then, in the evening, I come home, there was Mama Block sitting in one corner; my wife in the other

corner, when I come home. They're both crying. I says, "What's the matter now?" "Well, Mama don't want me to move and I don't want to move neither." I says, "All right. Well." So we stayed on--stayed on for another year with them, and then we moved to Nonpareil and we stayed there till 19--whatthehell is it? This house is fifty-two years old. 1915, we build this house.

M: This house?

A: Yeh. And here's where we raised the two children, Roy-- Roy, he passed away in 1964. He was a naval architect out Pearl Harbor. Had a big job and everything but he had some kind of a--he went over to Saigon or someplace, you know. We sent a lot of warships over to them and they went over there and he went and boarded them and he didn't put on mask and everything. He says, "Well, you can't see." So he caught some kind of a disease and for years he had to take blood, every other day. He had to take blood, you know, injections. And so then he passed away and that--that killed me. Up to that time, I was perfectly all right. After that, why, it's pish. Well, he was taking care of everything for me. And he was a son nobody could say anything against. Then I got my daughter down here. So she got married to a Cruickshank. The old Cruickshank family.

M: Cruickshank?

A: Yeh, Cruickshank. One of the boys is still with the First Insurance [Company of Hawaii, Limited].

M: How do you spell that? C-R-U . . .

A: Yeh, C-R-U-I-C-K-S-H-A-N-K. I don't even know how to spell it myself. [Edward Keith Cruickshank married Ruth Elsie Ahrens.]

M: What was your son's name?

A: Roy.

M: Roy. Your daughter's name?

A: Ruth.

M: Ruth.

A: My daughter has a boy. He's in the university now. He's taking up an extra course. He graduated from there, but he's taking up an extra course. He want to be a teacher, so . . . that's Edward Roy. And then I got a daughter-in-

law, Phyllis. Phyllis Ahrens. My son's daughter, Trippy, she's a bank examiner, you know, to examine the bank. Well, I think she makes about a thousand dollars a month from that. She travels all over. [Trippe Victoria Louise Ahrens]

George Clark and him were great chums and they had a football team years ago. And they were going to raise-- raise a football team. Well, so George Clark, he was successful. He got a boy. But Roy, he's got a girl, so he give in. (Lynda laughs) No football.

M: Could you remember--could you tell me some of the stories about your experiences?

A: Huh?

M: Could you tell me some of your experiences that you had here, way back in your early years?

A: Well, you mean the work and stuff.

M: Yeh, uh huh.

A: Yeah, well, I worked for a streetcar company and the several places that I told you that I work all over. I work on everything. And then I went out in 1947 to Pearl Harbor and I worked there for eighteen years and I got pensioned off. But, in the meantime, why, I used to wind armatures here, you know, on spare time the work. Then I was custodian for the Knights of Pythias Hall, where now the new telephone building is. It used to be the Knights of Pythias Hall. I was custodian for that for forty years.

M: The Knights of Pythias, is that what you mean?

A: Yeh. That's an organization.

M: Yeh.

A: See I'm a fifty-year member in the Masonic Lodge. I'm fifty-year member of the Knights of Pythias. I'm--what is it?--the Eastern Stars. [Order of the Eastern Star] Let's see, I belong to the [Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic] Shrine. I belong to the Blue Lodge. I belong to the German Benevolent Society. I've been president of the German Benevolent Society thirty-nine years.

M: Oh, was that organized when you first came?

A: Huh?

M: Was that organized when you first came?

A: Huh?

M: Was that organized when you first came?

A: Well, when I first came, yeh, but it wasn't organized that way. See, it was run by the German Consulate. See, they didn't have this here, see, at that time, you know. Any of the poor Germans, why, the only place they go is to go to the consulate to help them, you know. So they--there was Isenberg and Hackfeld and Schaefer, I think. They put up so much money to start this German Benevolent Society. We're now financially fixed. We just gave, a few months ago, a thousand dollars to the Shrine. Shriner's Hospital [for Crippled Children]. And then they got another organization here--FISH. We gave them something. And then we pay--see, we just lost one of our widows, but otherwise, we had six widows that we pay every month--we pay them from \$25 to \$35 a month.

M: Oh! Widows of whom?

A: Huh?

M: Widows of whom? Of members?

A: Yeh--any--members, of course. It costs a dollar a year to belong to it. A whole dollar. As president I kept plowing away and still, still now I want to get out, but they all come and say, "No, Pop, you stay with it. You're the head of this thing. You're holding it together." During the war [WW I], you know, they took it away. Old Charlie McCarthy was then governor [Charles J. McCarthy, 1918-1921] at that time and he got it back. They took it and gave it to the social workers, the German Benevolent Society. So I went to Charlie McCarthy and talked to him. He's a good friend of mine. So we got it back again.

M: This is during World War I?

A: Yeh. Yes, World War I. Yeh. And there was--and then they never--I tell you the way it was, 'cause you know in Germany, and all places, there were prisoners, but here, we were the same. I seen a time, there was a family up on Liliha Street. They had two girls, one was six or seven and the other was --two girls, anyway. But the husband was a German, born in Germany; but she was born in Kauai. And they just came up there --the army come up there, took the man and wife and put them over on Sand Island, leave their two children there.

M: Oh no.

A: Yeh. I tell you, we were in dangers around here. Of course it wasn't the government, just some of them young squirts, you know, and we have the same thing today, so. But anyway, I plowed through it all the time, me and a fellow by the name of Steengraf. He passed away, this way.

M: What's his name?

A: Steengraf.

M: Steengraf.

A: Yeh. He passed away. Yeh. So, well, all this is history, so I went through and I plowed through it all the time and everytime I want to quit, they know--the woman folks especially. They get up, "No, Pop. Pop, you stay. You're the head of this thing. You're holding it together. If you can't go out and visit You've been holding this German Benevolent Society together for thirty-nine years, and you can't go out but you telephone and all the widows always inquire."

And every Christmas we go around, you know; we give them Christmas presents. Say, for instance . . . (he now yells at a dog, "Get out of here! Get out! Go back! (Lynda chuckles) He belongs down below but--this woman, she's a dog-lover, so anyway.") Anyway, I stayed with it, and now, for instance, this Christmas we give them fifty dollars a piece, the widows that we got, and some of them widows that's not on our pension list, we give them too. Just lately, Bredman--Vamir Bredman (phonetic)--I don't know whether you know Bredman. Well, he used to be in the Coast Guard. He died. Well, we gave a hundred dollars to the expense--the funeral expenses and then we put her on a list and Christmas we give her something. So it's an organization that nobody knows about. But we spend at least, well, about pretty near \$1,000 a month on different things.

Years ago, when we had nothing, I used to go around--go around to these poor people and find there if one of them . . . I came to the house. They living on--you know where that school is on the other side of King Street, the Waikiki side, in there. She lived in there, you know. I come there and Williams was his name. He was--and then I come there and I still gotta see that she gets--small kids. I says, "Gussie, how're you doing?" She says, "Oh, Papa, we got nothing to eat. We got nothing. Look!" "Let me look." So I looked in the cupboards and everything. I says, "All right. I'll fix it." I goes out for a basket, you know, and I come back to buy grocery and everything. Give it to her. See, them days I was only the--there was one man. One man, practically. We had a board of five, but one man, I was doing everything. And I enjoyed it.

So then he took sick and Dr. Hartman--no, not Hartman, Mossman was then the City and County--in charge of the Maluhia Home up there. So I went to him, you know. I says, "Look." So he come out and he looked and "Oh," he says, "we've got to get him out of here." He says, "All right." So he telephoned for the ambulance, he picked him up, put him in the ambulance and took him out to the City and County to take care of. But all that time, when I was still working every day too. So . . . well, I done my share.

And I used to be on the--and I'm still on the Knights of Pythias. Forty years--fifty years a member and I've been on the sick committee ever since. And we've got a Widow and Orphans Committee, so I told them I want to get off of it, but, no. Says, "No. You stay on. You stay on." See, on Christmas, we go around like this here. We go around and see all these widows and we give them cash-money. We used to give them, before we give them a box of candy or anything like that, somehow. But now, we decided to give them money. They can buy what they want. So I'm still on that. Yes, so, I'm not dead yet. (Lynda laughs) But I tell you, I pretty near feel like it though. Yeh. Well, from then on--Knights of Pythias.

See, and then I got interested--see, I went to Hawaiian Trust [Company], you know, and, see, we made it that some trust company should have charge of the money all the time. So I went there and they persuaded me, you know, to invest money here, there, in all the utilities and everything, and I used to invest that so we got a nice income every three months. We got a nice income. And I, of course, myself too, otherwise, I wouldn't be able to stay at the hospital out there. Twenty-five dollars a day.

M: But that's cheap, really. I was in the hospital for two days last month. It was \$50 a day.

A: Yeah, I was in there. My son too paid \$50 a day. Yeh, but here was a convalescent. [Laniolu]

M: Yeah.

A: But, like my sister writes--she's eighty-four now. She's in Germany. And I just had a letter from her. She says, "So far I'm able to keep house yet," she says, "but when I can't, I don't know what I'm going to do. My daughter and my son, they can't take care of me, because they've got a family and got no room." And she says, "They call it Altenheim. That's the old people's home." She says, "But we got the old people's home here, but they're for rich people, not poor people. The only one that can belong to it." It's the same thing here. The majority.

I just had a fellow here Charlie Patrick. He worked for the Navy Yard. He's retired. Well, he's in the eighties now. He says, "I don't know what I'm going to do." He says, "I can't go to a home." He got no wife, he's got no family. Nothing. But he belonged to the Masonic Lodge. You know, you heard a lots about it, but you don't hear--all the good you heard; you don't hear the other part, you know. They got a home out Dakota. I was there. It's good. But there's so much tribulation to it. It takes an act of congress to get him in there. So . . . I don't know.

But so far, I . . . well, your husband knows that I'm pretty well. That I've got enough money to last me. At least he tells me I keep going until I'm a hundred years old. (Lynda laughs) And I slave for it, let me tell you.

M: Yeh. What did they ask you . . . when . . . you worked for Rapid Transit, what exactly did you do?

A: Huh?

M: What exactly did you do for them in the shop?

A: Everything. Everything. Repair automobiles. Repair cars and wind armatures. Run the machines. Do everything. Handyman. I'd run the lathes and shavers and stuff in the machine shop and I'd wind the armatures [electrical work] and run the shop.

M: Did they make their own streetcars?

A: Huh?

M: Did they make their own streetcars?

A: No. The streetcars were shipped in here.

M: Oh.

A: But I had to buy them all, you know. Yeah. When I went away in '23, Johnson--he's gone--Clark is gone--when I went away, they got them new Payee (phonetic) cars. You've seen the Payee cars? No, you didn't see them anymore. Anyway, we got them. And Johnson, he went up and he telephoned from Philadelphia. Chafin was then the acting manager and I had my ticket and everything ready to go to Germany to my folks' golden wedding anniversary. So he sent a cable, "Hold it off! The cars are coming." So [Alfred Lowrey] Al Castle was then president and I always go there so I got ahold of Al and I told him. He says, "Look, Adolph. I put yourself in my place." He says, "Your place is to go and celebrate your father and mother's golden wedding

anniversary. You got the money to make the trip. So the Rapid Transit's going to take care of itself." And when I come back, he brought a flatfoot, Reed, great big boy, didn't know a damn thing. All he knowed was shipping. All he ever done is travel with--from Brill (?) Company, you know, with cars, you know, ship 'em. Well, they put him superintendent and I had to go back to work and, of course, that didn't suit me. So after awhile, then, I got out and went to Pearl Harbor.

I went to Hawaiian Pine for two years and then I got a call from Pearl Harbor. You see, I'm a DC man. They've got AC and DC current and they had the big fifty-ton crane there and they needed one there. And a fellow, the name of Ballentyne--Ballinger, he was there. And Adolphson was the Master of 51, the electric shop. So he says, "Send me a man that we will need for that." He says, "Adolph Ahrens." So he come up here and he talked me into it. Well, at that time, I always hated that long ride. Now it's nothing.

So anyway, I went down there and they questioned me and everything and then I climb up on the crane and I show them that I could manipulate it, because it was all controllers like Rapid Transit. And so I had to go downtown. Got to go to the office where you enter. I made out an application and a fellow of the name of Cooper--I never forgot him. He had a (?) with glasses in front. He made out my application, and anything that I didn't know, why, about cranes and anything, that wasn't So I had to go down to see some woman in the post office that had some connection. Well, when I come there--and they kept--and Captain Wilson at the time--he had okayed mine. So she's supposed to okay it but she wouldn't okay it, because it should have gone through regular course, through applications. So I says, "Well," I says, "I still got a job." I says, "I don't worry, but," I says, "don't the Captain's name mean something?" And then she got mad. She said, "Oh, I'll sign it, but," she says, "I don't like it." (Lynda laughs) So I went out there and I climbed on the crane and start to work. And I worked there and then after awhile I went off the crane. I done the repair work and all the electrical crane in all the whole Navy Yard.

M: You repaired them or you operated them?

A: Huh?

M: You repaired them or you operated?

A: I was operator for--but I had a rating of electrician. See, that gave me the extra money. So, and then when I left there, I was special lead man.

M: A what?

A: Special lead man.

M: What's that?

A: You know, that's like a--like a foreman.

M: Oh.

A: Yeh, you see.

M: When did you retire from there?

A: 1947.

A: '47.

A: Yeh, '47, yes. (long pause) At least that--that's what I did.

M: You didn't work after that.

A: I took care of the Knights of Pythias Hall. Janitor and custodian and everything. And then winding armatures and repairing automobiles and everything. Anything that was money in it. (Lynda chuckles) But then when my wife left me, that was the first blow.

M: She died in--what did you say?--1962?

A: Huh?

M: Your wife died in 1962?

A: 1960.

M: '60.

A: Yeh. (He then speaks of the dog again) You know, he tries the door. Gotta lock 'em. He wants to get out. Yeh. So now--now I'm just hanging on. (Lynda chuckles) I want to see your husband sometime and talk over . . .

M: Yeh. How did you know Bill [William] Borthwick?

A: Oh, I met him when he first came here. He belonged to the Knights of Pythias and I met him on Nuuanu Street. And he lived in Candle Lane.

M: In what lane?

A: Candle Lane. You know . . .

M: Chandler?

A: Candle Lane, we called it. It runs off Fort Street, through there. Not anymore now. So, he was the undertaker. He was there together with Townsend, first off, and then he started building the--you know, you pay in so much for burial and everything a month and everything. And so Bill, he plowed along and plowed along, till he's--he's got a great big house up on Church Street. [William Borthwick's home was eventually on Wyllie Street in Nuuanu Valley.]

M: Yeah, he did very well.

A: Yeh. Yeh. I call him a reprobate when I see him. "Oh, you old reprobate." "Well," he says, "it's the same old thing." He says, "I'm paying for my sins, staying here. But, every night when I go to bed, I says, 'God, let me wake up in the morning.'" (mild laughter) So, he prays.

But I don't get out so much now. My daughter, [Ruth Ahrens Lang] she works down at Medical Group. She's the receptionist there. And he [James H. Lang] works for a real estate and my son's still going to school--my grandson. So I don't get out very much.

M: You have a very nice house. I like your house.

A: I tell you, I get--here, I show you my house.

M: I'd like to see it.

END OF SIDE 2/1ST TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen, 1979

Edited by Ruth Ahrens Lang, 1979

Note: On page 13 Mr. Ahrens states he went to work at Pearl Harbor in 1947 and on page 19 he states that he retired from his work there in 1947. Based on his birthdate, he probably started working there in the late 1920's and retired in 1947. [ed]

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.